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Jeremy Gemetta

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OBSTACLE AS INSPIRATION:

Producing *IMAGO DEI*

Jeremy Gemetta

MFA Imaging Arts / Live Action Production

COLLEGE OF IMAGING ARTS AND SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

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Jack Beck, Thesis Chair

Associate Professor, Production Program Chair

School of Film and Animation

Tom Gasek

Assistant Professor, MFA Program Co-Director

School of Film and Animation

Howard Lester

Professor, MFA Program Co-Director

School of Film and Animation

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Connecting, sharing, breathing into life: for me these are the magic behind filmmaking. I strive to express more than the sum of visible parts. Movement and its absence are visceral tools to express temporality and relationship dynamic; they formed the concept for my thesis film, *Imago Dei*.

Story always captivated me: over time, I found I could engage people with it, but was frustrated by inconsistent results. My instinctive grasp of image as a storytelling tool did not help me string visual essays into a narrative.

Imago Dei would be about the magic of human connection. Inspired by Chris Marker's use of stills in *La Jetée* (1969), I conceived a static world where a wizard was persecuted for making the magic of motion. I would parallel emotional stagnation with lack of interpersonal connection, using stillness as a central metaphor. Still pictures would break into moving image as the story progressed. I would incorporate live-action and stop-motion techniques to layer the story with magical quality.

The main problem with my concept was that it was a nebula of form and character. Paraphrasing Howard Lester, "You can't make authentic characters serve form. You need story: cause and effect, choices, conflict."

With this in mind, a narrative developed, and the script cried out for movement. Marker's film succeeded because he used a narrator to create external continuity and singular point-of-view. The story I had needed a diegetic voice. Once I stopped fighting to keep the form, the story was unveiled. The conventional narrative achieved subtle irony that my experimental form could not: stillness conveyed through moving images.

With the guidance of advisers and instructors at Rochester Institute of Technology, I learned to weave "image essays" into a story rather than imposing arbitrary continuity by accepting the limitations that confronted production as creative opportunities.

The Beginnings – Proposal

Starting in February 2011, I was kicking around three ideas for a thesis project. All of them were narrative fiction pieces. My underlying goals were to accomplish each of the following: create a film that required live action and animation compositing, to incorporate stop motion animation, and to tell the story as visually as possible, minimizing dialog and exegesis in general.

The first idea was a sort of prison escape fantasy. The idea was loosely based on a real German POW escape incident that occurred in Phoenix, Arizona, around December 23, 1944. A group of POW's escaped, heading with crudely fashioned canoes out to what they assumed was a navigable river seen on their maps – the Salt. The idea that a river might only flow perennially did not occur to them, thus they were unable to float to Mexico as they hoped.

The premise I borrowed was that of a near-perfect escape foiled by the unexpected. In my story, two cellmates mistrusted each other, but eventually collaborated to escape, only to find that they were imprisoned on an alien world. This story candidate had a clear plot with narrative throughput, but seemed to lack potential for stop motion integration, and I could not get a strong sense of character for my cell mates. Also, I had no idea how to effectively create a world that would surprise the audience at the end when revealed as alien when the characters had clearly struggled to survive on it for the bulk of the story.

The second idea I gestated was inspired by Bruce Springsteen's song, *Atlantic City*, a straightforward tale of a struggling musician who takes a contract hit out of despair. He decides at the last minute not to go through with the killing, but is discovered by his intended victim, confronted, taunted, and ultimately kills the target in rage and self-defense.

Again, this story had clear plot narrative, and the advantage of a stronger sense of character. The crippling limitation to my larger goals was the lack of any need for serious composite work (except perhaps in the final conflict scene) and no viable way to work in believable stop-motion animation. I shared the idea with several of my peers, who also felt the plot lacked the surprise and intricacy they liked in much of my other work.

The final story I considered was one of a wizard who was persecuted for his magic. The tale was more of a concept than a plot or story – the idea was to tell an anachronistic story of redemption and sacrifice in a world where still image is the normal for human perception, and a “magician” who can see movement shares this ability with others. Two films offered much influence in the tone and pathos I wanted the film to have – Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1969) and *Pleasantville* (1998). The concept – a story told in still images was taken from the former, and the idea of a figure that could bring a people to a higher order of perception was taken from the latter. Another film that was of some influence – in terms of the color palette and art direction, was *The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus* (2011). This last inspired the idea of the wizard working in the circus, as well. The imagery overall was intended to be “Jules Verne meets Tim Burton.”

Ultimately, because it had some clear potential for stop motion integration, would require some compositing, and could showcase my strengths as an image-based storyteller, I chose this last story to develop. My peers loved its high-concept idea, and complex potential for subtle character development. I was excited about the main character, Jacob Lightfoot. I saw him as a sort of flawed messiah figure, which I knew had tremendous dramatic potential because of its duality. In *The Power of Film*, Howard Suber speaks of duality as an important dramatic device:

*Some of the most memorable characters are those who contain within themselves the potential for both good and evil, and the possibility that the protagonist will move from one to the other can create a powerful dramatic tension.*¹ (Suber, 2006, p. 192)

As I drafted the treatment, some strong shortcomings became evident. I had no idea who the wizard was as a person, or why people were afraid of him. Further, the concept could easily support a feature-length production. I had the conflicting limitation of having department authorization, time, and resource for developing only a short film. I pared and honed the concept down.

The treatment of the story was unveiled largely in still images that would run every three to ten seconds, depending on the detail and gravity of the image. There were many incarnations of the wizard, now called Jacob, over the next two months.

He evolved into a carnie magician who could make people see animation that moved. The story introduces Ana Stone, a widow prison guard who wants to be more, perhaps an artist. The story implies she may have lost a family.

Jacob shares an animation with a boy named Edwin, which is the first thing on screen in motion. The boy runs out – in motion. Continuing with still image, Jacob is quickly imprisoned for his “witchcraft,” tried, and sentenced to death. Ana is his guard, and Jacob and the widow begin to bond. The story continues to move in and out of motion pictures and still, becoming less and less still image as Jacob continues to share his magic.

At this point in development, I secured a tentative crew, score composers, and animators. I would direct the live action sequences and function as cinematographer in the stop motion animations. I had two people who verbally agreed to help cast. I composed a timeline and proposed in May 2011. I came up with a \$7000 budget, planned some fund-raising and constructed a timeline that would span roughly eight months starting in July 2011 with about 12 weeks of live action production.

I still needed to select an advisor. The professor I had worked with most closely in development, Naomi Orwin, was leaving the college, so I had to find a different chair for my thesis. My first choice was the live-action department chair, Jack Beck, but he was abroad teaching an immersion production class in Croatia. To my delight, he agreed to chair, provided Naomi could act in his stead until his return in June of that year. The resulting proposal, then titled *Interchange*, which would focus on the idea of what was happening in between the frames of the film, received unanimous approval from the committee.

Pre-Production: Obstacles Arise

Over that summer, I had scheduled myself to work up a full screenplay and start preliminary casting. I fleshed out the finer details of production. The approach and methodology were to be as follows: the film would be hybrid stop-motion live-action, using Digital Capture, Dual System Sync Sound, to be edited in Final Cut Pro, with stop motion sequences made with Dragon Stop Motion. Post-production

compositing work would be done in After Effects and Apple Motion. The target video and audio specs were HD 1920x1080, AVCHD Codec, 48KHz, 16-bit Stereo. These were standard full High-Definition specs supported by the department, and while I wanted to remain fully compatible with the school's higher-end display capabilities and equipment support, I did not want to be subject to the equipment availability limitations so often an issue for thesis students. Further, I wanted cinema-quality lens control with my video capture system. As a result, I planned several purchases, re-allocating funds from camera and audio accordingly. The biggest new expense was a PL adapter to mount the cinema-quality 35mm lenses available through the school equipment cage to my own Panasonic GH1 camera. The other major cost was a Zoom H4n portable audio recorder capable of recording 48-kHz-sampled audio in uncompressed digital format, using lo-Z XLR inputs.

While technical end of things was certainly a financial obstacle, the creative challenges were proving far harder to overcome. The story was still lagging, and felt slow in spite of being jam-packed with murder, action, intrigue, a twist, character development scenes, and detail. Nothing felt right, and as the quarter began, I was still making major changes, even adding and subtracting major characters to try to solve the problems. In these developmental phases, every solution seemed to involve the addition of another character, which then created new problems.

Over the summer, I had several people who had wanted to crew become unavailable. At the official start of the academic year, I was thus beset with the challenge of finding new crew for key roles, and the film still totally un-cast.

I started wishing I had moved forward with the story about the musician-come-hit-man, as I knew the story's characters and throughput, and could have cast immediately. As it was, my supporting characters shifted with each of four story incarnations over the summer. In retrospect, I would have been well served to cast the lead, now named Jacob Lightfoot, but I felt at the time to cast him without knowing who the supporting players were would be a mistake. I had often seen performance in student films suffer due to poor chemistry between players, and Jacob's age had changed drastically between the versions.

This was the first time that I found something creatively useful grow directly out of one of my challenges. I could not get a handle on the main character Jacob's motivation. During a frustrated brainstorm, it occurred to me that I could merge the hit-man musician story with my current tale – I would make that Jacob's back-story. This helped me move forward because Jacob would have a reason to be a drifter and a reason to bond with the boy (who I now saw as the son of the man Jacob had killed.) I had at last, just before the second week of classes, a solid treatment to work into a first draft.

The narrative was sweeping in scope, and would stretch the limits of my budget and creative talents. It started on a boxcar, and then moved to the woods. Later there was a time jump (around 10 years); we then caught up with Jacob working in the carnival, where we learn he is secretly taking care of the boy. The boy accidentally kills his abusive uncle. Jacob hopes to amend the earlier murder by taking the blame for Edwin's manslaughter. Jacob is discovered for his earlier crime, and then caught by police (always thinking to save on the budget – I already had a believable police costume from a previous film) on an abandoned rooftop. We then experience another time jump as Jacob is sentenced for both murders. Next we meet the widow guard; Jacob bonds with her because she sees the boy Edwin – son of the killer's victim – so clearly loves Jacob. All this occurs using mostly still images, and as Jacob shares the magic of movement, this motion happens more in the lives of the three core characters. Jacob ultimately chooses to refuse Ana's offer to help him escape. He accepts the sentence to teach Edwin about accountability and mercy, and because he's "done running." This last element had been a motif throughout the piece and seemed fitting to work in as an element of the conclusion. In the end, Jacob would be executed in the electric chair, but the world would be set into motion for those who were willing to see the release of the magic.

The stop motion elements had taken shape as characters in the story. Jacob was given the gift of magic by a Joseph Campbell archetype – the mentor. This took the form of a hobo named William who showed Jacob movement using a frog puppet. Jacob kept the frog after William passed away, and the gift of sharing movement transferred to Jacob. The frog becomes a character at this point. Jacob

starts working on a crow that eventually functions as a player as well. The third major stop motion element was to be an electric chair that comes to life. The chair story would function as a sort of film-within-a-film that would aid the growth of the relationship between Ana and Jacob. The last action of the crow would be to replace Jacob on the chair then fly away free in view of Ana and Edwin.

Just a little heavy-handed symbolism there, and a skein of plot threads to weave. I had about 15-20 weeks to script and produce all this with an allowed twelve planned shoot days, so I knew I had my work cut out for me.

My first task was to get solid commitments from crew and to do immediate casting calls. I knew this would be blending pre-production into production, but I did not see another alternative; I knew I would need as much time as possible for rehearsing and scheduling production.

The producer I had approached before the summer, Christina Wairegi, was on board. Together we found an Art Director, Gretta Lewis. I had worked with Gretta in a class for which I had been a teacher's assistant the year before. Though she was just beginning her sophomore year, I had liked her work in her freshmen classes, and valued her integrity and artistic sense. She agreed, and wanted to see if a friend of hers would be willing to help. It looked like I might have an art department already! Two other crew that committed during these early weeks were Arzouma Kompaore as Director of Photography and a new graduate student, Vicky Mejia-Yepes, for sound. These early commitments were a relief, but also proved a source of stress down the line because student schedules change unexpectedly.

When I first created the lead character over the summer, I had written the part bearing in mind an actor with whom I had worked before, Jeff Moon. When I contacted him late in the summer, he told me he was booked through December, well after my principal shooting was to be finished. For alternatives, I searched the standard avenues supported by the department, word of mouth and the casting books in the School of Film & Animation equipment cage.

Within a week of classes commencing, it was already clear we were having difficulty casting the lead. While this was a daunting challenge, it was also fertile ground for creative solutions to other problems. While the casting process barely

staggered along, the script gained momentum. One obstacle to this was that I was running into a wall of words when I tried to move the audience back and forth between still sequences and motion scenes.

While talking to my advisor, Jack Beck, about casting issues, he pointed out something in the script that had me stumped. He felt many of my descriptions in the still segments were cumbersome. Further, the script was loaded with movement – or the need for it. He suggested that I abandon the concept of telling the story in still images and focus instead on conveying stillness and stagnation in a more traditional motion format. I realized that was the solution – all the movement I had been seeing in my mind’s eye suddenly had a place. In the very first revision after this, the resulting moments of stillness and stagnation gained tremendous dramatic tension, and the flow of the story was much improved. Thus, the stall on the practical side of production produced the first of many beneficial creative solutions.

Back on the logistical side, through all of September, the casting book proved fruitless. Most talent appropriate for roles in my film were already committed. Also, the casting books had a dearth of candidates that fit the demographic for my lead. It made sense, since the target age group – around forty-five years old – tends to consist of people who have jobs and can scarcely afford to commit time to acting for a lead role. Of course there are rare cases of successful working actors in that age group, but then it is rarer still that these actors would be able to afford to work with little or no pay in a student production.

We looked into new avenues to search for the lead. Casting calls went out via Facebook, Craigslist, Mandy.com, and a school-hosted website dedicated to the film, now titled *Imago Dei* (Latin for “in the image of God”). Several people auditioned for the supporting roles of Edwin and Ana. There were also at least two solid possibilities that applied for Ariel, Edwin’s love interest, and Yarnell, the abusive uncle. There was even a gentleman really set on playing Xerxes, a hobo character in the story as comic relief and a message bearer for one of Jacob’s key decisions later in the story.

Though my team’s efforts outside normal department avenues yielded several possibilities for the supporting roles, I was reluctant to commit any parts

until the lead was cast. October was passing quickly, and we had talked to two successful commercial actors, but they both backed out at the last minute. I pushed back the shooting schedule again and stepped up the efforts. I opened up possibilities – expanded the age range of Jacob, and made it abundantly clear that race, build, and acting experience were not an issue in all casting call literature.

What was most frustrating in this process was that so many actors expressed how interesting the lead was, but admitted reluctance to commit to the shooting and rehearsal schedule that the role would require. One professional actor who had backed out (he was starting a brand new production company himself) liked the script so much that he started sending my script to producer friends of his, citing my skills as a screenwriter. While his praise was flattering, it was also exasperating to lose someone who would have given the role his very best effort.

October was almost over, we still had no lead, and some crewmembers were starting to wonder if the project would ever get rolling. I met with my producer weekly, but as time wore on, her other commitments in her own projects began to take their toll. I found her harder to contact, and she was becoming less proactive in taking on responsibilities. In retrospect, I see ways I should have helped her with this issue. The main problem was not being able to stick to the timetable planned.

Around this time, a third person joined the art department, so things were finally gaining some traction. The art team was stoked, and doing great work collecting props for the sequence about which they were the most excited – the carnival sequence. I had a pre-visualization artist, Jeremy Sickels, do concept sketches for the crow, frog, and electric chair stop-motion puppets, and they were phenomenal. They helped with the promotional efforts, too: they functioned as a cornerstone for the movie poster I developed and distributed.

Meanwhile, all the crewmembers were asking if we would start shooting soon. The Cinematographer and Field Recordist were especially concerned, as their commitments were ramping up on other projects as the year went on. I communicated with them frequently to let them know the project was moving forward, and what the hold-ups were. This helped, but did not change the reality

that these fellow students had to honor other commitments as well. My discouragement compounded daily.

Fearing I might lose crew if I did not start production, we decided to shoot scenes that would not have the lead actor in them. Ultimately there was only one scene that did not have him, a point-of view flashback that showed there was blood on Jacob's hands. The scene required two camera angles and no actors. It showed blood pouring out by a refrigerator with a teddy bear nearby. Background sounds of a scuffle and a child crying, perhaps even train noise was to be added in post, so it was not even a sync sound shoot. Confident that we could do this before the close of the first quarter, we scheduled it. At last, it seemed production was finally underway.

Production: Herding Cats and Other Cinema Aphorisms

The first shoot was also a huge lesson for me on many levels. No actors, a familiar location (I had previously used the location where the kitchen scene was to be shot), and two shots without sync sound: it seemed like it would be a no-brainer. Full of confidence, I scheduled a full three hours for the shoot (an hour more than I thought I would need), prepped a lasagna dinner, and called in the entire crew for the shoot. The rationale behind over-crewing was to give everyone a chance to work together before more grueling shoots ahead. This was perhaps the only thing I planned well.

The shoot turned out to be a learning experience. Though we pre-scouted the location, I scouted in the day for a night shoot, and used material for special effects that I had never tried. Worst of all, I just assumed that blood would be easy to pour out: that it would flow through the frame just like in my imagination. It made matters worse when a number of crew showed up late; I told them the start time was soft since we "would not need the whole time."

Reality set in after numerous takes wherein the art department had to figure out how to recover the effects blood of which we did not have near enough. It took an hour to figure out a way to spill the blood on the floor that did not look faked, and even then, the blood never went where we intended. Further, the material was too

dark to look like blood on the floor we had chosen. My cinematographer was struggling to find angles he was satisfied with. From this I learned that it is essential to plan and storyboard with the director of photography even for the most straightforward shoot. The crew was tired and frustrated by the end, and I did not get the result the story needed. The only positives were the lessons learned and the lasagna. It was not a great close for the quarter.

I met with my committee and there was a lot of concern over the lack of progress. The committee saw I was putting in real effort, but I was not achieving the contracted results to this point. They green-lighted me to continue with a slower expectation of pace. I was considering trying to push everything out one additional quarter to make sure the production maintained expected quality. The problem would be that I would lose crew and potentially cast by doing so. As they say in the film business, producing is like herding cats. It is very challenging to coordinate needs, schedules, and resources under even near ideal circumstances. Under my circumstances, it was starting to seem impossible. Between the failure to produce results despite so many valiant efforts, and a hurricane of issues developing in my personal life, I was almost ready to give up. It was only the moral support and encouragement of my thesis advisor that kept me going at this point.

During break, a perfect storm that had been brewing in my personal life tore loose on the terrain of my filmmaking. My son was struggling in day care because he missed his father, my wife and I had a strained relationship that was near breaking, and I was in a downward spiral of negative emotion and fatigue. As the quarter began, we found out my wife was pregnant, she got a job offer that she had to take in Delaware, then I was diagnosed with clinical depression, PTSD, OCD, and borderline ADHD. I shared all this with no one except my advisor at first, and this was perhaps my biggest mistake.

In the first week of the second quarter, I was concerned that my art team was not responding to communications. At the end of that week, the Art Director informed me that she – and the entire art team – could not continue on my project. She cited the reason for breaking the commitment as the unexpected level of involvement the new quarter course load was putting on them. Though I could

never get them to confirm this, I suspect the lack of progress made to that point was a discouragement to them as well. In my eyes, at that moment, I had all but failed.

I half-heartedly sent out a call for replacement art direction. I continued searching for a lead actor. I considered re-proposing the entire thesis and starting from scratch. I was at a loss. At the very least, I knew I would have to push back production at least one quarter. With the new schedule, there was one bright ray of hope – a Jacob’s Ladder of light in the dark of my personal storm. I contacted the actor for whom I had originally conceived Jacob, Jeff Moon, to find out what his availability was with the new schedule. He had some concerns about the physicality of the script (lots of sprinting, a scuffle, and shaving his head to be “electrocuted” in the final scene) but thought he could do the new schedule. I was willing to work to make some compromises in the script that would serve the story and be within his physical abilities.

What I did not see at the time was that this would be perhaps the greatest creative opportunity for the film. The brewing personal issues forced me into a position where I had to finish on the original timeline to preserve my marriage. I scaled back the scope of the story to be produced with the consent of my advising team. We agreed that I would put together a feature-film production pitch that would cover the scope of the original idea. I would re-script a sequence from the original project that could be re-tooled to be a complete story to be filmed. The feature binder combined with the screened film would be my thesis.

The re-draft of the script was the boxcar sequence of the original film. The new story changed the fate of my Joseph Campbell oracle archetype ² (Campbell 1949), William. In the longer piece, William passed away in the night, and Jacob, not knowing he had died, would slip away with the magic frog to continue his journey. The revised script had him discovering his new friend dead. Rather than running from the pain as he always had, denying he even cared, he stops, and decides to deal with the hurt. This was a new and equally potent climax. It simplified the animation as well, as I would no longer need an animated electric chair sequence in the film. The new obstacle was that the story felt like it had no ending.

After the Christmas holiday break, I revised the shoot schedule and cast the remaining parts. It was hard to tell some of the interested actors that their parts had been cut, but to my surprise, everyone was quite gracious on that end. The only major issues with the new schedule were that my cinematographer could not make the opening weekend of shooting, and my field recordist could only shoot one of the two days. At this point, my primary producer, Chris Wairegi, told me she would have to step down from her producing role as her course load was also too much in the new quarter. She was still credited as pre-producer, and was available as back-up crew, but could not handle any further organizational work. At the same time, Donald O'Brien, the lead gaffer, stepped in and took on many producing roles. Later on, Donny and his family took on so many responsibilities that I credited him as both a producer and as a personal assistant.

I was up against a wall, and though it was not ideal, I decided to shoot and direct the sequence myself. Shane Burley, an associate producer at this point, had a lull in his commitments. He agreed to step in to direct the actors on set to free me to function as cinematographer. The plus side to this arrangement was that I would have additional footage to put in my cinematography reel.

The first shoot of the revised project was to be in the train yard, on Saturday, February 12, 2012. This became the official first day of shooting. After seeking every crew person I could, it seemed we would still be short since there were so many other very involved productions taking place. At the last minute, unexpected people signed on, including Stephen Spindler - on his birthday. He would turn out to be an essential crew and cast member on subsequent shoots. Another last minute sign on was Lea Lamorte, who also became an indispensable part of the producer pool.

The location, the Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum, and its representative, Joe Nugent, were extremely gracious and helpful. Mr. Nugent told me I could leave the set dressed indefinitely. This took tremendous pressure off subsequent shoots. Indeed, without the museum's help, my film would not have been completed. They allowed us open access to the grounds, use of their heating and electrical systems – and even cooking facilities for craft services. They also wrote us a proverbial “blank check” to schedule shoots there as long as we needed

provided we gave them enough notice to have someone on site. They even volunteered to drive the trains to make sure I could have exterior shots.

Even though I still was unhappy with the end of the story, we started the shoot. This new “first” shoot still had many problems, but they were largely due to not having time to have an art team come in to dress the set beforehand. While it was not a period piece, it was art intensive and needed not to appear modern in any way. It was a great location, and though we started very late, we made good progress. We wrapped an hour past schedule after verbally okaying this with everyone and letting go those who had to leave. This was where the last major obstacle occurred.

The actor who had been so excited to play Xerxes the hobo told us at the last minute he could not come out for the next day’s shoot. Unfortunately, all his critical actions and lines had not yet been shot. After he made a phone call, he told me that he would not be able to come back the next week, either. At that time, the end of the film hinged on information Xerxes gave the lead. Making matters worse, the actor who played William would not be available for two weeks after that. If I postponed those shoots, I would not come even close to meeting the thesis contract requirements for the quarter.

I considered my options, and from this crisis-level obstacle, yet another solution appeared. The actors who had played Harold and Lloyd, minor hobo brother characters whose roles were largely done, had done such an excellent job fleshing out their characters that I had what almost amounted to a vision. I imagined a new ending on the fly.

The existing characters, loosely borrowed from Curly and Moe of *The Three Stooges* became something deeper, more like variations on Lenny and George from *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck 1937). These fit the story pathos better and gave the story an ending. Lloyd would get in a fight with Harold off-screen. After William’s passing, Jacob would encounter Lloyd, alone and disoriented, and decide to travel with him, completing Jacob’s journey of human connection. The origami cranes that were a set-dressing afterthought came into play as well. Instead of a crow, Jacob could animate one of the cranes, to share the magic he had learned from William.

Now Jacob had a choice, a resolution, and there was clear magic in the story. The animation became a more integral part of the story as a result.

I approached the actors who played Harold and Lloyd (Christopher Clark and Toni Perri, respectively) to see if they could broaden their commitments. They graciously agreed. I re-scripted the story and the next shoot that night. Their performances were a sort of key. Thanks to them, I had reached a point where I could see all the characters. I started to care about the characters as individuals. I recalled a book lent to me by Jack Beck, called *How NOT to Make a Short Film*, by Roberta Marie Monroe.

*Creating characters is simple. What do they want? Who or where do they want it from? And how do they get it or do they get it at all? Why do they want it and, if they do get it, at what cost? Want, Where/Whom, Why.*³ (Munroe 2009, 31)

Her words resonated with advice given to me by numerous advisers and screenwriting professors. Her thoughts on character gave me a clear mechanism for re-directing the script, and I had been trying to answer these questions subconsciously already. The rest of the story flowed.

The next day, even though the crew was tired and there were substantial changes, the shoot went ahead of schedule. After the first major weekend of shooting, the only remaining issue was what to do with the Xerxes character, which was already a small part of what had been shot.

The next weekend the solution presented itself, again in the moment: Stephen Spindler agreed to be a stand-in for Xerxes so that I could edit in a few shots to “write out” the Xerxes character. This eventually streamlined the final draft of the script, which was a very good thing. Though the film screenplay was a mere eight pages, the two pages we had shot were on screen for about five minutes. In the end, those eight pages ran roughly seventeen minutes. The Xerxes version had been eleven pages, and would have probably run well over twenty less coherent minutes. We finished the interior boxcar sequence that weekend save for a few pickups, just in time to meet my contractual obligation.

The next quarter saw its share of challenges as well, and each of those opportunities inspired new creative solutions. Lenny Muscarella, the actor who played William, had a death of a close friend. I planned to postpone his shoots, but after a few days, he called me to say that he wanted to work – it would keep his mind off the grief, and his friend had been an actor and as Lenny told me, his friend “would have wanted the show to go on.”

Lenny’s performance, already very good, stepped up a notch – the pain fueled a sense of anguish that gave William even more depth. This helped me see a pattern: that these obstacles were the inspirations of the real story, not just for me, but also indeed for filmmakers in general. I thought back to another idea from Howard Lester, paraphrased. He often told me that good stories responded to the environment, and that limitations fueled creativity. I saw this being embodied as the solutions to the challenges I faced kept strengthening the movie itself.

Other unexpected challenges arose, of course. Arzouma Kompaore, the original director of photography, was only able to make one of the twelve live action shoots. This gave me a chance to create the cinematography throughout, especially after Lea Lamorte stepped up and functioned as set producer for the remaining major shoots

In retrospect, I see this was another vital turning point for the project creatively. I had been in the mindset to take my clear mental picture of the cinematic look and communicate it with Arzouma to enhance and execute. I now had an opportunity to see the visual story elements through from concept to post - production, which ultimately is one of my ongoing passions as a cinematic artist. Now color, composition, and camera angle were as much a part of my storytelling vocabulary as were acting, blocking, and timing. The upside was a unity of vision throughout that required a minimum of translation. Many scenes were ironically expedited as a result.

The downside was that I really needed others to step in and be extra eyes on performance and continuity. At times that no one could step into this role for me; then shoots would go slower than normal. I was much freer to try experimenting on the fly with a visual concept to support a dramatic intent. The flip side of this was

sometimes I could not judge the experiments that were unsuccessful until much later, forcing more reshoots.

The most successful experiment I had was the varying the composition of close-ups within a scene to underscore the connectedness of the characters. When Jacob is keeping his emotional walls up, I used close-ups that did not have other characters in them. When Jacob let others reach him, or when he reached out to others, I used the so-called “dirty single:” an over-the-shoulder or other type close-up that involved another character physically in the same frame. This resonated the presence and connectedness between the characters with a clear visual cue.

I love to use existing light to its greatest advantage in my photography, and I was able to explore this in all the exterior day sequences. I also got a chance to try to recreate campfire light artificially for some pick-ups. This was a challenge, but one of the more satisfying successes of my thesis.

One instance where my experimenting led to extra work was shooting sequences in the boxcar. I stayed far off-axis from talent faces and eye-line. My rationale was that it might enhance the disconnectedness between the players. On watching the dailies, I could only concur with Jack Beck, that this served only to make the audience feel more disconnected from the characters. It was harder to engage audience empathy. I wound up reshooting many shots the next weekend.

Except for that first weekend of reshoots, pickups were often short crewed. This is almost the norm in student films and in that way does not really count as an unusual obstacle. These two- to three-person crews also forced creative solutions. I often had to keep shots tighter than the original storyboards, to filter out parts of the set the small crews did not have time to dress, and to improve sound capture. These closer shots were far more emotionally intimate, and I think they vastly improved the scenes in which they were used.

Post Production: “It ain’t over till it’s over”

The production faced several more challenges along the way. We wrapped up a few weeks behind schedule, but I felt confident that I could finish and screen the film on schedule. This confidence turned out to be premature.

Throughout the ever-delayed schedule, my digital colorist, Max Johnson, was becoming more and more concerned. He had two other projects of vast scope and demand that were largely complete; by winter break, I had yet to give him anything except test footage from the kitchen. He felt especially pressured since his craft-track thesis depended in part on my film as well. After the first two weekend shoots, I gave him a rough cut. Together we put together the look of the film in two afternoon sessions, and he showed me his work flow in Apple Color so that I could finish anything that I did not allow him enough time to complete. The look I wanted was grainy and contrast-rich, not unlike bleach-bypass. I wanted a de-saturated palette that would have warm shadows with cool highlights. This was something of a reverse to the popular “warm-orange” highlight “cool-blue” shadow found in many contemporary feature films. The goal was to create a dream-like sense, along with a melancholy, pensive nostalgia. The color would gradually saturate in the final few scenes as Jacob’s heart began to “awaken”, until the final scene was full color without any substantial hue shift.

This helped the colorist a lot. Unfortunately, his stress continued when I could not deliver to him a final cut until about ten days before the film was to screen. I offered to complete the color if he could not. He was very unsure, and feared his thesis might suffer. Ultimately he was able to complete the color except for one replacement composite shot that I had to insert during the final week of the academic year. The fact we were able to finish this part of post-production was in large part to me having a clear vision of what I wanted, some experience in color to communicate that to the colorist. This and the detailed “template” sessions we had done earlier helped him complete his work in time to add it to his own thesis presentation.

Throughout the shooting schedule, I had been editing rough cuts. My intent had always been to get an editor. Now that I was both director and cinematographer, I felt this need was even stronger. The film needed to communicate a lot, and I feared that if I directed, shot, and edited the film, the story would not come through clearly. I was sure there would be many things where the edit was wrong for narrative flow simply because I knew what I meant so I would

not be able to see it failed to come across. After much searching, Lea Lamorte found an editor, Caroline Caceci.

There were only a few weeks left, and I was actively working on a fine cut for the first five scenes. Caroline agreed to edit the second half of the film to fine cut. She would trade halves with me so that I would bring her fine cut to final cut and she would do the same for my five scenes. This solution worked out well because it saved time and streamlined communication. I could see where she was going, and vice-versa. It made it much easier to tweak what was not working. Her perspective added depth and clarity to the story throughout.

This collaboration turned out to be irreplaceable because of another unforeseen crisis. I was almost done with my fine cut scenes when I dropped the hard drive. The drive failed. I was frustrated by the loss of my hardware, but not panicked at first; I had backed up all my data except for the last hour or two of work. I went to recover the backed up files, and that entire directory system was corrupt. At that point, I shot past panic to despair. I bought another hard drive. I researched and found a program that was able to recover most of the data from the damaged drive, but it was an incredibly long process, over twenty-five hours of data transfer alone to get everything (except for one unrecoverable file) from the first five scenes. I would not have made several deadlines – including the screening submission required by the department – had I also needed to recover the last seven scenes of the movie as well.

We were able ultimately able to create an almost final cut, but there was one vital piece of production still lingering. The composited animations were planned and started, but unfinished. I put in placeholders in the fine/final cut edit that were timed exactly. The final animations were added and recolored at the last minute.

These last elements should ideally have been done alongside the final stages of live action production, but I had pushed it off till postproduction for two reasons. The first was simply the chaos and delay in scheduling. The more essential reason was that by waiting till post-production was well underway, I would have two experienced animators to work with, Rachel Fisher for the crane and Max Lopez for the frog. This was extremely desirable to me because it would give the animated

characters (the crane and the frog) personalities that were more distinct. Also, I could shorten the schedule for animating since there were many things I could have both animators work on simultaneously.

The drawback to this approach was the stress it put on the animators to finish on time. It left little opportunity for redoing animation, and even less for compositing. Fortunately, Warren Sheetz stepped in to help with some last minute compositing issues, and it turned out for the best. That being said, in retrospect I would not have gone this route for the sake of the sanity of everyone involved.

The opening and closing title animation were the only parts of postproduction finished well ahead of schedule. Vidhya Sukumaran and Lucas Gonzales produced a beautiful set of animations for the opening title based on a concept I gave them. I storyboarded moments from a story that Jacob tells at the start of the film. They created character designs and movements that were perfect. I composited them into a title sequence using Adobe After Effects with four days to spare on my time line.

The last clear case of a setback turning into a creative opportunity is what put the closing titles in the “finished” column. I simply made the best of some unexpected down time. During one of the many production delays, which one I honestly cannot even remember, when I had nothing else to do but wait for an authorizing response from one of the many principals in the film, I was able to take a final shot of Jacob and Lloyd walking toward the camera and off to a new future. This shot I modified using some filter effects, hand digital painting, and compositing to create the end titles to a fade out point. The block in one area gave the time and headspace to create end credits that were far better than what I had planned.

Of course, when talking about creative solutions that arise from challenge, I would be remiss not to talk about one such opportunity that I missed. My earliest commitment on the project – indeed the first one I had in writing, was from composers, Matt and Roxy Hornbeck. They are Seattle musicians, film score composers, and teachers, who had agreed to make an original score for the film. What I did not know was that their schedules went from busy to absurd in the course of my production delays.

I was concerned that communication with them had slowed as my postproduction got underway. As my deadlines loomed, I found I did not even know what was happening with them, and they were not responding to communication. We had planned to work together in Skype sessions and by e-mail, and I set up a digital drop box so we could share video and audio files. Despite plans and preliminary schedules, these communications never happened. During these two weeks of near silence, I passed on two opportunities offered by some people knew locally to create music for me.

It was not until three days before deadline that regular communication resumed. I found out at this point why they had been so silent. My slow production schedule had brought other commitments to the fore for them, as well. They had just opened a musical drama that they produced for their company, Quiet. In addition, their class teaching schedules were in the thick of one set of finals and a new quarter beginning. Despite all this, they assured me that they were almost finished with scoring based on a rough cut, and would talk through the placement of the tracks in the final cut and try to make any last minute changes that might be needed.

At 10:00 PM the night before the screening submission deadline, I was verifying final video renders and cleaning the last minute composite shot. My audio, minus musical score, was in its final mix phase. I still had no music. At the last minute, the composers ran into upload difficulties.

By 8:00 AM, they were re-uploading the files. Two hours later, I finally had the composers' .wav audio music files downloaded. In spite of my requests for 48 kHz sampled tracks, they were set at 44.1 kHz. I opened them in Sound Track Pro and resampled them to 48 kHz files. Another 30 minutes were gone. The composers were uploading a fine cut of the film with music tracks placed on it, but this file would not finish transferring through SendSpace until almost after the submission deadline. The sprint-paced solution was this: based on the track titles and an e-mail of rough timing placements from Matt Hornbeck, I threw the music tracks on the Final Cut Pro timeline for my project. I then made modifications based on second opinions from Donald O'Brien and Vidhya Sukumaran, who I must mention were there for that entire final rendering night. We listened to cue timings, set mix-down

levels, and rendered the final film. My thesis submission was a bit like a James Bond epic; it was uploaded to the server only four minutes before submission deadline.

The resulting soundtrack was quite adequate, but I was disappointed that there were not more places where the theme took on the darker tone I had hoped. I was so set on my original plan that I overlooked the opportunity to make changes that could have enhanced the film.

Perhaps, had I worked with the local composers who offered their last-minute services, the back-and-forth interplay this would have provided would have given the music a more polyphonic voice in terms of pathos. At the very least, I would have had a chance to preview tracks, to offer input and guidance into the sound that was produced that would better fit the needs of the dramatic moments that evolved. The composers gave me what I asked for, but I missed an opportunity for far more.

Screenings: In Conclusion

The thesis screenings were a perfect way for me to gauge what I had learned in the program. After the film screened, there were many comments from peers and faculty. Most comments were indicators that I had learned much about storytelling during my time in the program. There were a lot of helpful observations, as well. Several people mentioned that I had actually done too much to help other students with their projects in my final few quarters. I learned in the closing weeks of my time at RIT how to prioritize commitments, and even how to say no to some.

Perhaps most surprising to me was how much of the story's subtext came through in the final film. I was overwhelmed by the insight and thoughtfulness of my respondent, Charles Bandla.

In that response, Bandla pointed out and articulated ideas he gleaned from the film for which I did not have such eloquent or succinct words. I realized in that moment that I had finally been able to craft an expression that amounted to more than the sum of its parts. The film grew and thrived through unexpected collaboration and my willingness to accept limitations and obstacles as inspirations for creative solutions.

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APPENDIX A: Original Thesis Proposal

INTERCHANGE

Thesis Proposal

Jeremy Gemetta
Spring 2011

Gemetta, Jeremy
Thesis Proposal

Title: Interchange
Category: Live Action Animation Hybrid
Duration: 15-20 Minutes (Approximate)

Synopsis: A condemned magician and a widow prison guard find unexpected completion in each other.

Technique: This will be shot with digital video and digital stills.

Preface/Set-Up: The film will be a combination of motion live-action, still photography, and stop motion animation. The still image scenes are not entirely unlike Chris Marker's *La Jetée* or a Ken Burns piece, where parts of the story are unfolded like an animatic or storyboard pitch with still photographs. The motion scenes are either pure live action or composited hybrids of still photos and live footage. The film takes place in a world with an artistic style of Jules Verne meets Tim Burton. Most shots are close-framed images, claustrophobic, clearly not modern. Wide shots are a sense of relief almost unseen.

TREATMENT:

IN STILL IMAGES: Ana, 29, is in the office of an art gallery. Her submission is rejected as too unoriginal. Ana leaves the office. A child calls her from behind. Ana turns, the child apologizes, saying she thought Ana was mommy. Ana cries by the gallery restroom.

IN STILL IMAGES: Jacob, 45, is at the carnival in a tent. He puts on a magic show before a bored audience (of one) turning to exit. Outside a young boy is lost, seeks help, but goes unnoticed by everyone except a bully who chases him. The boy ducks in the tent unseen; he bumps Jacob. Jacob sympathizes, asks if the boy wants to see real magic. The boy says yes. Jacob takes many large bricks and one small brick. He moves them faster and faster, it becomes an...

ANIMATION: Bricks loom large; they move to crush the little block. The little block wedges in a spot between bricks, the other bricks pile on but cannot crush the little block. Soon they have formed a massive arch bridge, the little brick as a capstone.

BACK TO STILL: The boy is in awe. The boy looks up at Jacob and we see JACOB MOVING: Boy's POV as Jacob says that the boy is important, strong like the little stone. Jacob's POV, the boy, STILL, begins IN MOTION to smile, he runs out.

IN STILL: A policeman runs through the carnival, talks on his radio, rushes the tent. Jacob escapes out the back. Jacob runs through the woods. Falling in a stream, he hears dogs. Jacob pulls a small bird puppet out of his pocket. He bends the wing back in shape as he rises. Jacob runs to a tall ruined building. The cop, saying, "Stop or I will shoot," is right behind Jacob. The cop fires and misses Jacob. Jacob is out on the rooftop: at one edge, then looking over another. The cop comes out. Jacob throws the bird, which IN MOTION flies away. STILL, Jacob surrenders.

IN STILL: Ana is putting on a prison guard jacket. Ana sweeps the floor by the electric chair. Ana cleans the chair. Ana forcibly cuts her hand on the skull plate of the chair. Ana watches the MOVING blood. Ana pictures herself in the chair.

STILL: Defense calls Jacob to testify. Defense whispers, begs Jacob to show the court. Jacob is silent. Prosecution counter-examines. Jacob is silent. The prosecution talks about Jacob's perversity, describing a corrupting evil. Jacob says it is not like that. The prosecution continues jeering at Jacob's witchcraft: movement. Jacob gets angry, MOVING stand up before the court and shouts that it's not like that at all. BACK IN STILL the court recoils in shock. The bailiffs subdue Jacob. Ana stands guard at the inside of the court entrance.

STILL: Ana sits alone at a dinner table, painting. Outside she sees MOVEMENT; Jacob's crow flies. As it flies, she sees wind move the trees. We hear a car's brakes squeal as BACK IN STILL Ana's eyes close hard. In bed, Ana looks at a picture of a man and a boy, reaching to turn off a light. CUT TO BLACK with a switch SOUND.

STILL: Jacob is sentenced to death. Prison life for Jacob: Sitting next to cell neighbor, Cory, Jacob at work in a workshop. Cory talks about his past life outside as a florist. The two men talk about both being innocent; Jacob's final appeal begins soon.

STILL: Ana cleans the electric chair switch. Looks past her own image to see another self in the chair, imagines throwing the switch to a sound of brakes squealing. Ana looks into the hallway of death row.

STILL: Jacob sleeping next to Cory as Cory cries. Jacob gets up; they hold hands through bars. Jacob builds an animation puppet lily. Jacob gives the lily to Cory. ANIMATED: The flower blooms, closes, then blooms again. BACK TO STILL: Ana catches them talking after lights out. Ana puts Jacob in solitary. They talk about movement. He charms her. He intuitively feels that she has lost much and is challenged by and afraid of his insight.

STILL: Ana breaks a half-finished painting of death row she did, goes to bed.

MOVING: Ana dreams of a little boy in a field of broken lilies running toward her. She bolts up awake, notices her movement, freezes.

MOVING: Cory watches the lily; a guard comes and he hides it behind the pillow. IN A MOVING FRAME, Cory *holds still* while the guard (IN STILLS) stops in front of his cell to talk to a custodian. Cory looks at the guard's keys.

STILL: Ana visits Jacob. They talk; she becomes convinced he's innocent. She talks about her job, how it carries stains of its own. She tells him he is a kind man, brushes his hand. An alarm goes off. She runs out. MOVING, Jacob cries.

STILL: The guards gather around an open cell door as Ana rushes in. She sees Cory (IN MOTION) leaving with the lily and lets him go.

STILL: Ana comes to talk to Jacob. He shows her an ANIMATION of an electric chair. They talk about what she saw, and both begin to MOVE. She reveals a sense of guilt about being obsessed with work; she had her husband take their son to school, about the accident that day. He tells her she's no more a murderer than the chair in the animation she saw. BACK TO STILL: Jacob looks at his hands, tears in his eyes.

STILL: Ana passes co-workers in a cheerful hurry to get home. They notice. She talks about Jacob's charm. One guard asks if she thinks he deserves to die. She says maybe no one does. Outside, MOVING, all the beauty of the world moves by. She seems energetic, alive. Home, she finishes a painting, happy with it.

MOVING: Ana talks to Jacob about his witchcraft. He says he feels compelled to share movement with the world. She tells him he is a good man. He snaps at her, says she has no right to judge him as good or bad. She tells him how he has helped her feel liberated. He reveals he is no longer sure if his gift is a blessing or a curse.

MOVING: Ana learns Jacob's last appeal is denied and comes to him. She takes him to the prison library. She shows him an exit and tells him how he can get out. He asks her what would happen if they discover she helped him. She does not answer. He waits, and then asks her to take him back to his cell. She pleads with him to go. He refuses, and says he has to stay. She asks why. He does not answer. Back in the cell, he gives her an animation and asks her to look at it at home in private. She snaps at him: You know it is my job to perform the execution. How can you do this to me? He replies he's afraid he lied to everyone, even himself, he understands now that the punishment is just. In shock, she leaves.

MOVING: Jacob has his last meal. Ana watches the animation at home. He has guilt, but the guilt he assumes is not (fully) his.

STILL: Ana is at the gallery, leaves her new painting. She goes to work. As she leads Jacob down the corridor to the chair, Jacob apologizes for hurting her. He forgives her. She apologizes for what she has to do. He says she was already forgiven. They seat him as (IN MOTION) Jacob's crow flies away from a window, seen only by Ana.

MOVING: Ana sees Jacob's breathing. She looks at him, says she can't. He begs her; he wants it to be her in sorrow and compassion not someone else. She goes to the switch. STILL witnesses look on as Ana throws the switch. MOVING JACOB arcs (and vanishes? or stills?), then light and MOVEMENT fill the room. People look at the (empty, or still shot of Jacob?) chair. They see each other moving. Some begin to cry. Then STILL resumes.

STILL: Ana is at home. The phone rings: she says no, she will not be in today. She goes to the gallery. They want to exhibit her new work. She smiles. Outside the gallery, she leaves with a painting under her arm. She is at the steps outside the gallery walking away. She looks up and sees, MOVING, Jacob's bird flying past the roof. She looks back down, smiles, turns from the gallery, and walks away.

Rationale:

I hope for my thesis to contribute to the art of filmmaking. To this end, I want to go beyond the scope of what I have previously produced. At the same time, I wanted it to also reflect my skills as an artist, a culmination of what I have learned in synthesis with my other skills. Finally, I also hope to use the thesis as a springboard into my professional career as a cinematographer specializing in stop-motion photography.

Responsibility:

Jeremy Gemetta will DP stop motion segments, assist with compositing, write, direct, and help to produce this work.

Producers: Shane Burley, Christina Wairegi

Casting director: Thomas Macias (Tentative)

DP (Live action): In dialog with Andrea Romansky and Xiao Li as possibilities

Sound design Consultation: Jack Beck and Dave Sluberski

General crew: Shawn Gray, Jeremy Sickels,

Animators: Carolyn Depp, in dialogue with Max Lopez and Maggie Boyle for additional/alternate assistance

Score/Composing: Angela Sheik or Matt and Roxy Hornbeck

Colorist: Max Johnson (thesis track, verbally committed)

Photography Consultant: Mark Foggetti

Recruiting: Editor, recordist, boom, gaff, art direction

Timeline:

SUMMER:

June 2011: Pencil Test concepts for compositing, recruit crew, begin casting

July 1st: Complete first draft, casting continues

August 1st: Primary Casting complete, location scouting

September 1st: Rehearsals begin, locations secured

FALL 2011:

Weeks 1-3: Rehearsals with talent continue, dress rehearsals on location where possible. Script locked, Days 1-2 of shooting.

Weeks 4-6: Days 3-8 of shooting, logging footage, blocking out an editing timeline

Weeks 7-9: Rehearsing, shoot days 9-12, send footage for initial musical scoring, begin primary compositing

Weeks 10, 11: Pickups as needed

Winter 2011:

Weeks 1-3: Shoot days 13-15, principal shooting finished, begin distribution research, brainstorm thesis report ideas

Weeks 4-6: Additional pickups, ADR if needed, compositing continues,

Week 6 end: Rough cut complete, compositing enters fine tune stage

Weeks 5-7: Fine cut, rough sound track in place

Weeks 8-10 Color timing, compositing

Week 10 end: Informal screening

Spring 2012:

Weeks 1-3, final compositing, titling, production packaging begins

Weeks 4-6 finish color timing, titling, final soundtrack polish

Week 6 end: Rough Draft of Thesis report

Weeks 7-9: prepare various exports for screening and festivals, burn DVD's, get production package to all interested cast and crew

END week 9: Wrap Party

Week 10-11: Begin festival/distribution efforts, submit thesis report.

BUDGET:

Interchange
 Length: 15 days
 Location : TBA Rochester, NY area

Budget 4/20/11
 Shooting 09/2011-12/2011

Sheet # 1
 Page # 1

	Category	Specifics	Cost	Budget	Actual Cost
	Script & Rights			\$0	
	Producer			\$0	
	Director			\$0	
	Cast			\$500	
TOTAL:				\$500	\$0
	Travel			\$300	
	Hotel & Lodging			\$300	
	Food			\$1,551	
	Camera	Kit, Crew, Expendables		\$200	
	Lighting	Kit, Crew, Expendables		\$200	
	Sound	Kit, Crew, Accessories		\$150	
	Locations	Fees & Permits		\$300	
	Art Dept	Props, Wardrobe etc.		\$1,576	
	Office Expenses	Paper supplies, fax, internet etc.		\$150	
	Petty Cash			\$50	
	Film or Tape Stock				
	Lab	Developing, dailies, etc.			
	Insurance			\$400	
	Editing				
	Shipping			\$50	
	Still Photos	etc.		\$250	
	Contingency	10% of production costs		\$523	\$0
TOTAL:				\$6,000	\$0
	Final Post Online	Conform, Color Correction, etc.			
	Final Post Mix	Sound mixing session			
	Marketing/Festivals	postage		\$500	
POST				\$500	\$0

GRAND TOTAL \$0
GRAND TOTAL \$7,000
ACTUAL GRAND \$0

APPENDIX B: Thesis Film Production Script

Imago Dei

(Final Draft: revised 03/19/12)

Jeremy Gemetta

Jeremy Gemetta
405 Abbotsford Lane
Newark, DE 19711
(928) 607-2053
jg@jgmedia.com

JACOB LIGHTFOOT (42) wears a ragged army coat and dog tags. His face hasn't seen a razor in a week. His hair is fading. Jacob follows behind HAROLD (35) and LLOYD (50) along a train. The two in front scope for an open car.

JACOB
...and the crane swooped down,
ignoring the words of the frog, and
swiped the fish out of the pond.

Harold spots an open door, looks around. Harold climbs in, nods to Lloyd, who starts up the step rail but drops his bag which spills out. Jacob looks into the distance.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Bird choked right away, tried to
spit it out...

HAROLD
Jacob, you give him a hand?

JACOB
(oblivious)
...then he started to get stiff,
struggled to flap his wings...

HAROLD
(hopping back down)
Of course not, you're in Jacob-Land,
why would today be any different?

Harold smacks Lloyd's hat off as he backs down the step.

JACOB
(looking up, then
climbing in)
... The crane turned to stone and
dropped, splashed in and sank to
join all the other statues.

HAROLD
Come on. Where would you be without
me to take care of you?

Harold helps Lloyd grab his stuff and they start back in.

The guys file in yawning. Lloyd starts to sit, sees Harold standing, then waits. Harold moves to the spot where Jacob is, glares at Jacob. Jacob goes to the other side. Harold sits, then Lloyd sits. Jacob sits down, yawns, drifts off to sleep.

FADE TO BLACK

3 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

3

Over black, feet SHUFFLE, MALE mumbles sharply. FADE UP: a child's drawing on a fridge. A CRASH, a THUD. BLOOD pools across tile, spreading away the color, leaving pallid blue highlights and muted brown shadow. Off screen a KID CRIES. There's a figure in a cap at a door; the door SLAMS. Train WHISTLES as

4 EXT. TRAIN YARD - DAY

4

The eyes of WILLIAM HOPE (65) male, wearing the same cap from the kitchen scene, open. He stands up, sees the boxcar open, grabs his bag and hobbles over.

5 INT. BOXCAR - DAY

5

Harold and Lloyd sit by the door. XERXES (31) lounges under newspapers in a corner.

William tosses his cane and bag in, starts to climb, stumbles, the others watch. Jacob gives William a hand into the car then sits back down. William strains the bag onto his shoulder, looks around. Harold and Lloyd offer no room. Jacob SLIDES over. William sits.

WILLIAM
Name's William, much obliged.

Jacob draws on paper as William settles in.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Been running the rails long?

JACOB
Yeah. Not much into talking.

Jacob takes another sip and sketches.

WILLIAM
That's how you want it.

JACOB
Not personal. It's just easier solo.

WILLIAM
Nothing is personal anymore.

The train starts.

6 INT. BOXCAR - NIGHT

6

Jacob stares out the door playing with wire. Lloyd has some half folded origami on his lap. Lloyd pulls out a harmonica, strikes a note. Harold leans over, locks eyes.

HAROLD
Lloyd, that didn't happen.

Harold holds out his hand, Lloyd gives him the harmonica.

JACOB
There was a kingdom, with a miserable,
lonely king...

Harold taps Lloyd, points to Jacob. Jacob sits up more.

HAROLD
Here goes the oracle again.

Lloyd watches Jacob. William looks back and forth between Lloyd, Harold and Jacob. Jacob twists wire, looks out the boxcar door. Lloyd picks up a paper off his lap, folds.

JACOB
... And this court servant, goofed
around all the time. Blew one job
after another.

HAROLD
(to William)
His bedtime stories put ya to sleep.
Jacob, you wait till I'm tucked in?

Harold shakes his head.

JACOB
(twisting away)
The head servant tells him, "This is
it - last chance. Bring the King's
lunch." The servant got to it. Right
at the King's table, arm full of
trays, he trips, food flies.

William, still sitting, turns to face Jacob.

JACOB (CONT'D)
The servant front-flips, juggles and
catches the food, but it slides off.
And the King's covered in comestibles,
laughing like a child.

Harold shakes his head, lays down and covers himself.

JACOB (CONT'D)
The servant drops, ready for irons.
The head servant comes yelling, drags
him out. The King says, "Hold! Why
do you scold this man so?"

Jacob, twisting the wire, forms it into a jester's cap.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Head servant says, "The oaf can't
manage a simple task without a gaff."

Harold watches Lloyd - he's folding out a crane, has a few on his lap already. Jacob takes a drink.

WILLIAM

Then what?

JACOB

The king asks, "Servant, at what do you excel?"

Harold looks at the cranes, pats Lloyd.

HAROLD

Really nice, Lloyd.

Lloyd grins.

JACOB

Servant says, "Master speaks right, sir. I can't do nothing that don't make folks want to laugh."

William coughs, Harold shoots him a look, then turns to Jacob.

HAROLD

Story time's over, now.

Jacob looks at Harold, gets up and moves his stuff into the corner, back to the others. Jacob looks at the wire cap.

7 INT. BOXCAR - NIGHT

7

The train CHUFFS to a stop. WIND kicks up, William draws his blanket close, coughing. Xerxes glares at William, Lloyd puts a pillow on his head.

HAROLD

Shut up, old man!

Jacob pulls out the bottle, offers it to William.

JACOB

Lightfoot's Remedy cures anything.

William coughs and hacks. Harold sits up, takes a knife from around his neck, goes to William.

HAROLD

This is your stop.

JACOB

Harold, easy, he's older than dirt.

XERXES

Y'all shut up. Throw y'all off.

HAROLD

You stand with us or against us.

Xerxes rises. Harold locks eyes with Jacob.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
You're ticket can be up too.

Harold and Lloyd stand up over William, Xerxes rises too.
William gathers his things, rises.

JACOB
(rising)
This is my stop anyway.

8 EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

8

At a campfire, Jacob unrolls a sleeping bag for William then sits on his own blanket. William coughs, tunes an ancient radio. A SONG ends.

WILLIAM
I was a science teacher. Not one of
the essentials anymore. I've been
adrift since school RIFFED me. What's
your story?

JACOB
Burned a few bridges, fell in. Now
I run as the stream goes.

WILLIAM
Is it running if you're frozen inside?

Jacob lays back. A <thematic> COMMERCIAL on the radio.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Who were you telling that story for?

JACOB
I... I have to tell them. They're
for nobody.

WILLIAM
Stories are for everyone with ears.
That's why you... I mean "the servant"
could get through to the king.

Jacob looks at William, throws a log on the fire.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Can I show you something?

JACOB
They say it's a free country.

William stands across the fire from Jacob, who sits back up.

WILLIAM
See. Don't just look.

They lock eyes. William's hands move around the small fire.
The fire changes color, dances. Jacob spits liquor.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
I'll take that shot now.

Jacob hands William the bottle.

JACOB
You a wizard?

William upturns the bottle then hands it back to Jacob.

WILLIAM
My bio students were amazed that
frogs only see things in motion. I'd
wager no frog's seen you in years.

JACOB
You going to morph me into a toad?

William laughs and it turns into coughing.

WILLIAM
You're no prince. Not entirely sure
you're breathing.

JACOB
Breathing's overrated.

WILLIAM
Depends on how the breaths are drawn.
Ones I have left I want filled with
hope, life, love.

William coughs.

JACOB
You're sick, let's get you to a hotel.

WILLIAM
I'm not up to going anymore. You're
kind to offer.

William takes the bottle, drinks.

JACOB
Kind? You don't know me.

William shows Jacob a puppet FROG, sets it on the ground.

WILLIAM
No, you don't know you.

The frog starts to HOP. Jacob double-takes, picks up the
frog: it winks. BLUEGRASS comes on. William cranks the radio.
Jacob sets the frog down; it hops back to William.

JACOB
How does it...

WILLIAM
I'm a wizard, remember?
(beat)
I think we'd better dance now.

They dance around the fire, which also DANCES. Jacob keeps looking at the hopping frog. It's dancing too.

9 EXT. TRAIL - EVENING

9

Jacob and William walk, eating from cans. William has a coughing fit so hard he bends over, hands Jacob his can.

WILLIAM
Here. I can't finish it.

JACOB
You should try. It will keep you going.

WILLIAM
What keeps you going?

JACOB
I'm looking for what's left of a family. I shattered everything for them. I want to set things right.

The KITCHEN SHOT plays again, this time Jacob's the figure as the blood pours, blood on his hands, in shock and horror.

WILLIAM
Let me help you.

JACOB
I'm toxic.

WILLIAM
Maybe I'm immune.

JACOB
Or maybe just insane.

WILLIAM
Either way, I'd love another story.

Jacob takes a swig off the bottle then offers it to William.

JACOB
Okay... Maybe I feel one coming on.
There was a bear named Bill...

The frog pops it's head out of William's bag.

Jacob sees smoke rising in early light. Squints in the sun.

JACOB

The remedy gets revenge. You up?

Jacob rolls over.

JACOB (CONT'D)

It's early. We get moving we could catch the 7:15. William?

William is not moving. Jacob shakes William, already stiff.

On a hill top, Jacob kneels and puts a last rock on a pile. He looks into the setting sun, sets the FROG atop the pile.

JACOB

(long silence)

When I want them, words never come.
William was a good man... I think
he helped people...

Jacob walks away, turns back.

JACOB (CONT'D)

William loved people. Loved life.
He was a teacher. He was my friend.
Peace.

Jacob picks up the frog, walks down the hill.

Jacob walks up to Lloyd, who looks like he's been beaten and been crying. Lloyd rocks, ripped paper bits everywhere.

JACOB

Where's your brother?

LLOYD

Harold got real mad this time, said
my dumb birds will never fly. Started
ripping them up. He...

Lloyd looks down, starts breaking up. Jacob sits.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

I tried to stop him. I hit him back.
I kept sayin I was sorry but he said
I was crazy like pa and ran away.

Jacob reaches to comfort Lloyd.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
I saved one. Wish they could fly.

Lloyd reveals a paper crane, looks at Jacob, then back at the crane. The frog pokes it's head out of Jacob's Jacket. Jacob looks at the frog, then looks back at the crane, smiles.

JACOB
Harold took care of you, but it
doesn't mean he was always right.

Lloyd looks at Jacob.

LLOYD
What do you mean?

JACOB
(gesturing to the
crane)
Look. Look and see.

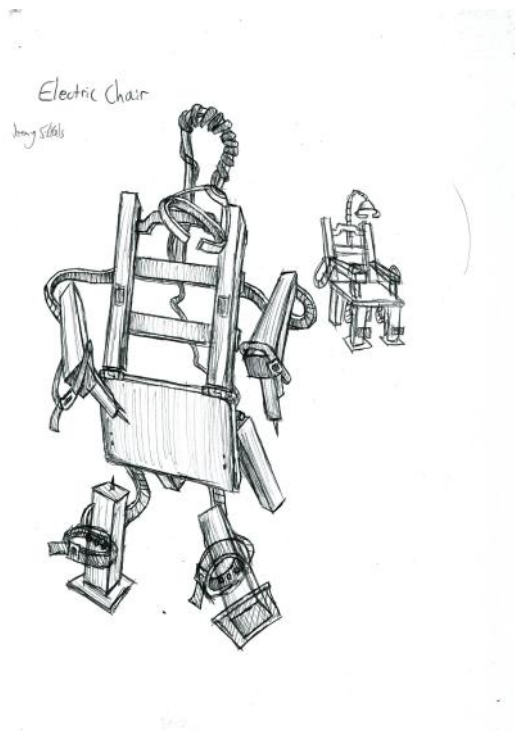
The crane starts to flutter, then takes to the air. After a second, it lands back on Lloyd's hand.

JACOB (CONT'D)
(rising, offering
Lloyd a hand)
There's a carnival in town, looking
for workers. Wanna go check it out?

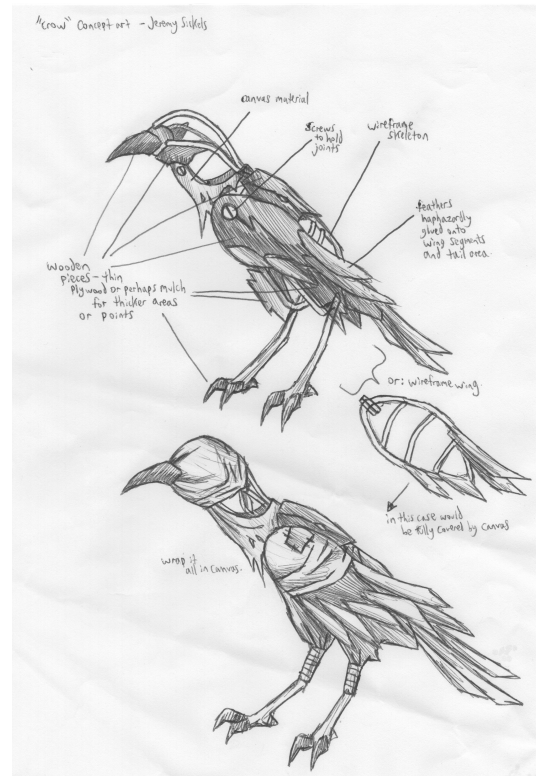
They exit.

FADE OUT

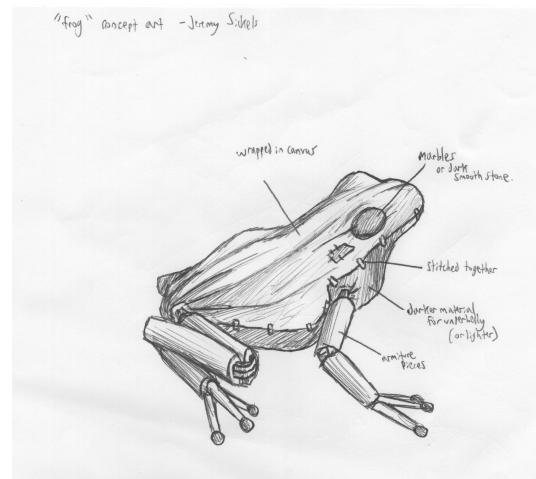
APPENDIX C: Concept Sketches



Electric Chair
Jeremy Sickels, 2011



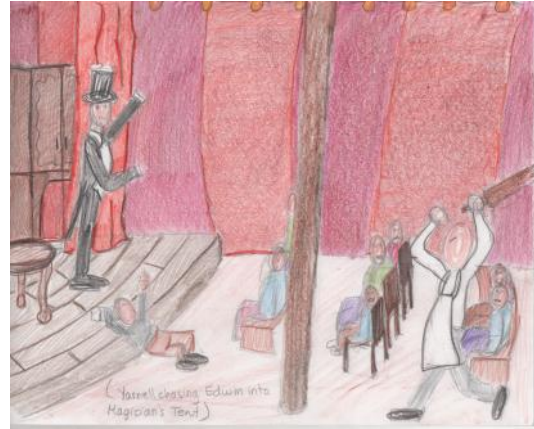
Tensor the Crow
Jeremy Sickels, 2011



William the Frog
Jeremy Sickels, 2011



Boxcar Scene
Phoebe Hewson, 2012



Magician Scene
Phoebe Hewson, 2012



Carnival Outside
Phoebe Hewson, 2012



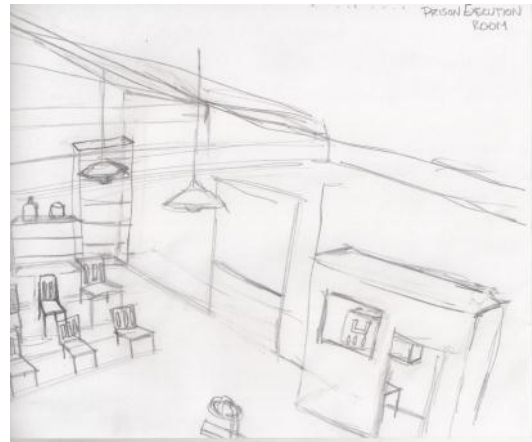
Baker's Tent 1
Phoebe Hewson, 2012



Magician's Tent
Phoebe Hewson, 2012



Baker's Tent 2
Phoebe Hewson, 2012



Prison Execution Area
Phoebe Hewson, 2012



Baker's Tent Scene
Phoebe Hewson, 2012



Prison Visiting Area
Phoebe Hewson, 2012

APPENDIX D: Animation and Color Proofs



Opening Title Proof
Vidhya Sukumaran, 2012



Opening Scene before color grade



Opening Scene after color grade
Color by Max Johnson, 2012



Frog before color



Frog after color
Color by Max Johnson, 2012

APPENDIX E: Production Stills and Selected Storyboards



Location Scouting Day 7 – Train Yard – 10/25/11
2nd unit DP Arzouma Kompaore pictured
Photo by Jeremy Gemetta



Shoot Day 3 – Boxcar – 03/12/12
Pictured from Left: Jeremy Gemetta, Stephen Spindler, Maria “Vicky” Mejia-Yepes
Photo by Lea Lamorte



Shoot Day 4 – Boxcar – 03/13/12

Pictured from Left: Jeremy Gemetta, Lea Lamorte, Jeff Moon, Lennie Muscarella
Photo by Shane Burley

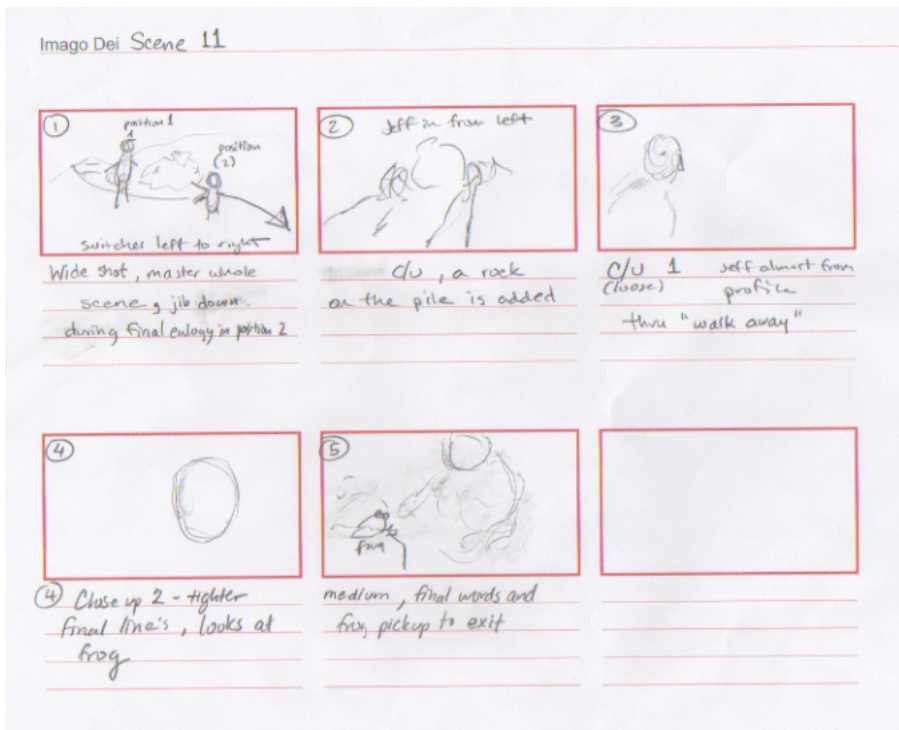


Shoot Day 4 – Boxcar – 03/13/12

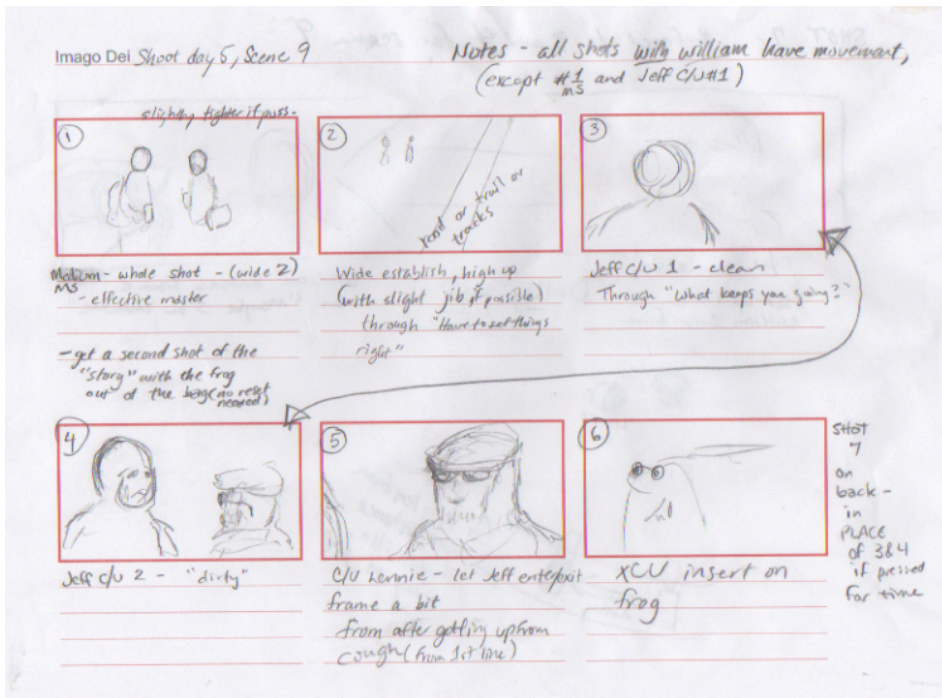
Pictured from Left: Jeremy Gemetta, Donald O'Brien
Photo by Shane Burley



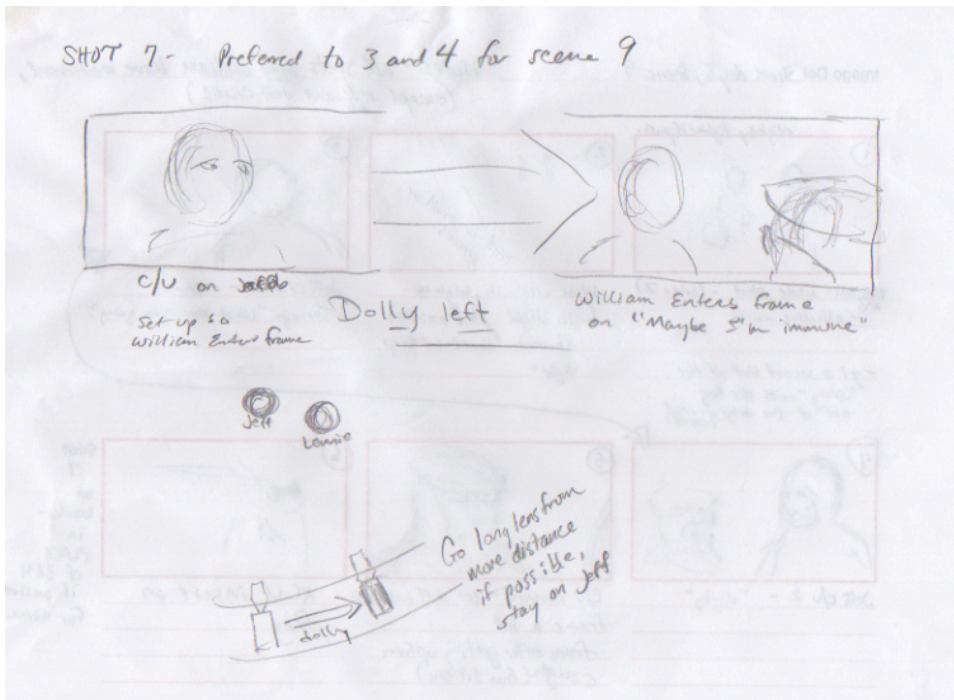
Animation Shoot: Day 2 – 04/30/12
 Max Lopez pictured, animating
 Photo by Jeremy Gemetta



Storyboard, Scene 11, Shoot Day 7
 Jeremy Gemetta



Storyboard - Scene 9, Shoot Day 5, Page 1
Jeremy Gemetta



Storyboard - Scene 9, Shoot Day 5, Page 2
Jeremy Gemetta